

Duxbury congregation to blend old, new

By Dorothy Newell
The Patriot Ledger

A number of Jewish families, wanting an inclusive worship setting, where non-Jewish spouses and children of mixed marriages can participate fully in the life of the congregation, are forming Congregation Shirat Hayam, or Song of the Sea, in Duxbury.

An informational meeting for the new congregation will be held from 7:30 to 9 p.m. June 27, in the Old Duxbury Town Hall, 820 Tremont St., Route 3A.

The speaker will be Chayim Herzig-Marx of Newton, a member of the executive board of the Pennsylvania-based Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, with which the new congregation is affiliating.

Other Reconstructionist congregations are in Attleboro, Newton, Andover and Great Barrington.

The Old Town Hall will also be the setting for the first services this summer at 7:20 p.m. July 12 and Aug. 10, and for High Holiday services beginning with Rosh Hashana Sept. 13 and concluding with Yom Kippur Sept. 22 and 23.

A spokesman for the new congregation, Duxbury publisher Fred N. Kugel, said it will be founded on the principles of being inclusive, participatory, egalitarian and contemporary.

The congregation will rent the Old Town Hall for a

sanctuary and for general meetings and classroom education. "I expect that initially we will have Sabbath Eve services the second and fourth Friday and will have services on the religious holidays as they fall," he said.

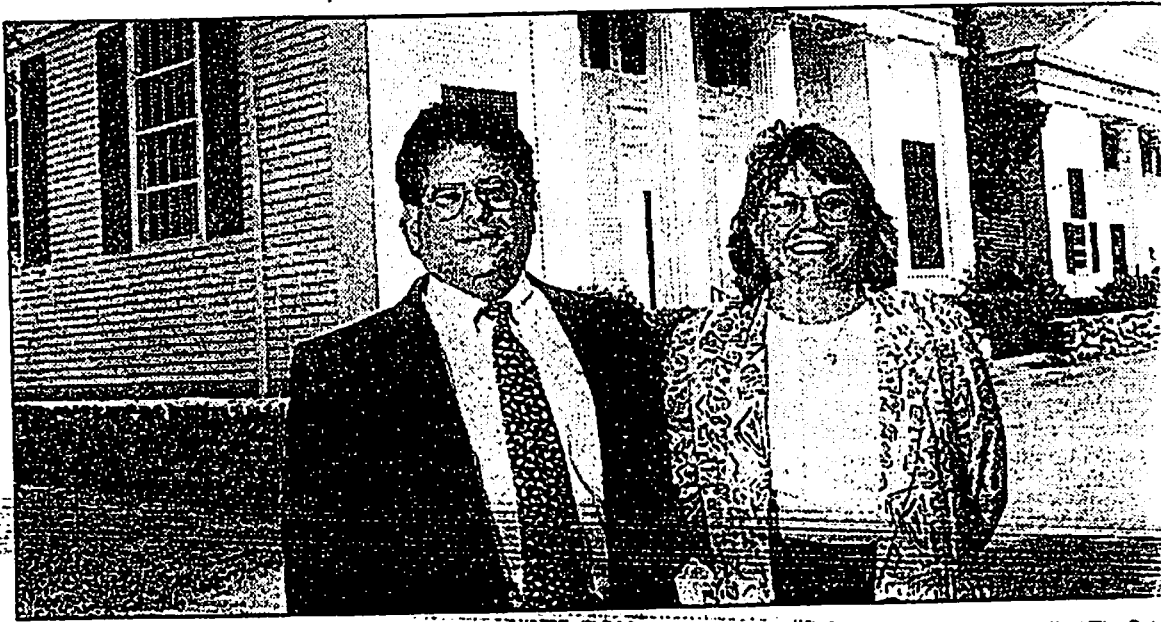
Some of the founding families have been disappointed to find the synagogues they have been attending do not allow non-Jewish spouses to hold leadership roles, Kugel said.

"In Judaism 56 percent marry non-Jews, and many of these families still continue to practice the Jewish religion and to raise and educate their children as Jews," he said. "Reconstructionist and Reform branches of Judaism have both reached out to those families and gave us the right and opportunity to do this without requiring conversion of the non-Jewish spouse."

But after being a member of Congregation Beth Jacob in Plymouth for seven years, Kugel, now vice president of the congregation, said he was "totally shocked" to find out four months ago that the congregation "did not and had never accepted his children as Jews" because his wife, Deborah, is not Jewish, and that in order for his daughters, now 8 and 11, to be bat mitzvahed, they would have to go through the conversion process.

In the Congregation Shirat Hayam, all members will be encouraged to be active and take leadership roles, Kugel

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Fred Field/The Pat

Fred Kugel, shown with his wife, Deborah, said the new congregation will be inclusive and contempo-

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said. "We will be gender-neutral, all members will be treated equal and have equal rights. We will also be contemporary. . . . We will honor traditional Jewish customs dating back 5,700 years and adapt and mold our traditions to reflect the realities of modern life."

Kugel said that, while others among the founding families have been distressed with the exclusionary traditions in their congregations, some will be affiliating with a Jewish congregation for the first time. "We all come with different reasons," he said. "Some have been alienated from their own congregations, some are looking for something different, some are unaffiliated. . . . This will be a new beginning and a new way to continue to practice Judaism and pass it on to our children in a modern, democratic, caring and yet

religious way."

Kugel said he looked into affiliating with the Reconstructionists, "a truly American branch of Judaism," after trying unsuccessfully to resolve his concerns in his local congregation. He also talked with the leaders of another nearby Jewish congregation and the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

"At first they (the UAHC) treated us with understanding and compassion and with promises of working with us and getting this situation resolved," Kugel said. "But as we progressed with it, we found them less and less willing to work with us. . . . We felt abandoned."

"Others have also had bad experiences," he said, "but we have taken a very negative experience and turned it into something very positive. We decided what we wanted and needed and found inspiration for a new beginning."